



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING  
WORK SESSION  
MONDAY, AUGUST 16, 2021 – 6:30 PM  
VIA TELECONFERENCE**

**ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:**

David Eady – Mayor  
George Holt – Councilmember  
Jim Windham – Councilmember  
Lynn Bohanan – Councilmember  
Laura McCanless – Councilmember  
Avis Williams – Councilmember

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Marcia Brooks – City Clerk/Treasurer  
Dave Harvey – Chief of Police  
Jody Reid – Utilities/Maintenance  
Supervisor

**ELECTED OFFICIALS NOT PRESENT:**

Jeff Wearing – Councilmember

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Art Vinson, Mike Ready

**Agenda** (Attachment A)

**1. Mayor's Announcements**

Mayor Eady did not have any announcements.

**2. Committee Reports**

**a. Downtown Development Authority (DDA)**

Mike Ready stated that Oxford College has reached out to the DDA to resume discussions about their plans for the space on Whatcoat Street currently leased by the City to Oxford College. At their last meeting they found that they did not have enough time to accomplish what they wanted to do so they have scheduled a work session for August 17<sup>th</sup> to further discuss the project. The work session will be a review for some, but should be especially beneficial to the newer members, and will serve to get all members caught up.

Mayor Eady asked about the status of the vacancy on the DDA. Mr. Ready stated that Matt Pepper had not been able to contact the person that had been recommended by the DDA before he left, so they are back at square one. Mayor Eady asked the Councilmembers to provide any recommendations they have. He knows of one person

who has expressed interest but has not yet been fully vetted. He will discuss this with the Councilmembers and with Mr. Ready offline.

Mayor Eady asked that the DDA keep the City Council posted on their discussions with Oxford College. He stated that there is funding set aside in the budget for architectural design, which will be needed to proceed on the project.

- b. Planning Commission – Mike Ready stated that the Planning Commission plans to discuss the final draft of the ordinance amendments they had recommended at their next meeting.
- c. Committee on Race – Avis Williams reported that Emory completed the filming they had planned. She also advised that Emory is holding a symposium and she will forward the information to Marcia Brooks to pass along to the Councilmembers.
- d. Trees, Parks, and Recreation Board – Laura McCanless reported that the board has been working with Beryl Budd and an Oxford College student on their tree inventory. They also have a representative of Reforest ATL coming to their meeting on August 17<sup>th</sup> to discuss their approach to remove invasive plant species.
- e. Sustainability Committee – Laura McCanless reported that Marcia Brooks had created a dashboard tabulating the survey results from the Dried Indian Creek Survey that they could view on demand. Ms. Brooks added that about 75 responses had been received so far and about half of those came back with utility bill payments.

James Windham recommended that the Sustainability Committee and the Planning Commission collaborate to look at building requirements for the City of Oxford. He also suggested that building codes should be incorporated into the zoning ordinances.

Mayor Eady stated that international building codes have been incorporated by reference in Oxford's zoning ordinances, but he agrees there is room for enhancement. Mr. Windham also pointed out that sometimes building codes are watered down. Mayor Eady agreed that there are other more stringent standards that can be reviewed for potential inclusion in Oxford's zoning ordinances. He stated he would confer with Mike Ready and Laura McCanless to give them some information about this issue for the two committees to look at.

### 3. **2021 Millage Rate** (Attachment B)

Mayor Eady stated that the revenue from real property taxes has just this year returned to the level it was in 2007. The City's General Fund also has more revenue than expenditures for the first time since 2007. The City Council needs to determine if the rollback rate should be adopted, which holds revenue neutral, or to continue with the millage rate from 2020, which would result in a tax increase due to increases in assessment value.

George Holt was in favor of taking the rollback rate for 2021. He also pointed out that in Oxford, property taxes will never be a substantial source of revenue for the City.

Avis Williams agreed with George and expressed that she is not in favor of a tax increase.

Laura McCanless agreed with George that property taxes will not pay for any services in Oxford, but she wanted to know the actual dollar amount of the impact of a rollback. Mayor Eady provided the figures from the 2021 property tax digest and 5-year history.

Lynn Bohanan was in favor of taking the rollback rate for 2021. She wants to give the people of Oxford some relief financially.

James Windham was in favor of taking the rollback rate for 2021. He also stated he would like for Oxford to eliminate property taxes for primary residences because of the insignificance of the revenue to the City's overall budget. Mr. Holt agreed with Mr. Windham about the small impact of the revenue and stated the same thing could be accomplished by allowing a 70-80% homestead exemption for property owners.

Mayor Eady stated he is also in favor of taking the rollback rate for 2021. Marcia Brooks will find out if any hearings are necessary, and the City Council will plan to vote on this issue at the September regular session.

4. **Tax Collection Intergovernmental Agreement** (Attachment C)

The Newton County Tax Commissioner's Office prepares the City's tax digest and bills and collects payments for taxes due. In the 2020 general election, a new Tax Commissioner was elected, necessitating the signing of a new Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with Newton County for these services.

The first agreement received by the City of Oxford included an additional \$1.00 charge that had not been in the IGA with previous tax commissioners. After this additional charge was questioned, it was removed and a new IGA was received that provides for billing the City of Oxford at the same rate as in previous years, \$2.50 per parcel.

No concerns were expressed with the agreement. It will be included on the agenda at the September regular session.

5. **Employee Handbook** (Attachment D)

Marcia Brooks stated that she sent two versions of the handbook to the Councilmembers – the one currently in force and the new draft version with proposed changes/differences notated in the margin. The staff have met with George Holt and with Department Heads and reviewed the changes with both, adjusting language after these discussions as appropriate.

Mayor Eady asked the Councilmembers to take the time between now and the September regular session to continue reviewing the document and send any questions to Ms. Brooks and copy Mayor Eady.

Mr. Holt stated that he had worked with Ms. Brooks and Matt Pepper on it and he believes they did a great job. Laura McCanless stated that she read it and also thought they did a great job.

Mayor Eady stated that if there is a need for additional discussion as indicated by email, the draft can be reviewed at the September work session. Otherwise, the issue will be included on the agenda for a vote on final approval at the September regular session.

**6. Official City Holidays (Attachment E)**

Mayor Eady stated that currently the City does not observe Veterans' Day as a holiday. Also, many of the City's employees must work on the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday to support the annual parade. He observed that since the City of Oxford does not pay employees as much as some other jurisdictions, one way the City Council can show appreciation to its employees is by at least ensuring that the major federal holidays are observed. A resolution has been proposed for adoption at the September regular session that will add Veterans' Day as well as Juneteenth to the list of official holidays for the City of Oxford.

There was consensus by the Councilmembers to approve the resolution in the September regular session.

**7. Building Permit Services Contract (Attachment F)**

At a previous Council meeting, James Windham had requested a review of the Bureau Veritas contract for permitting and code enforcement services. Mayor Eady provided some expenditure/revenue data to the Councilmembers that indicated the City has received \$22,721 more in permit fees than it has paid for Bureau Veritas' services since the contract was executed three years ago.

Mayor Eady stated that from a revenue standpoint, this privatization model is working, but he does feel there is some room for enhancement in the area of code enforcement.

Mr. Windham indicated that his questions were answered by Mayor Eady when he sent out the financial data.

George Holt asked what the code enforcement/property maintenance inspections clause of the contract provides for the City.

Mayor Eady stated that this service has not been performed much by Bureau Veritas, but it is intended to address the City's nuisance property and zoning ordinances. One reason the City has not availed itself of this service very much is because of the rate of \$80.00 per hour.

Mr. Holt asked if the times this service was used would be public record. Mayor Eady stated that it would.

Mayor Eady stated that there are a number of properties in Oxford that have essentially been abandoned. They have fallen into disrepair and are being neglected by the property owners. There is a process in the nuisance ordinance for dealing with such properties.

City Attorney David Strickland recommended to Mayor Eady that he discuss this process with the City Solicitor and Municipal Court Judge before taking any action on these properties.

Laura McCanless expressed concern about Section 11 of the contract, which limits liability to \$50,000. Mayor Eady recommended checking with the City Attorney and the Planning Commission Chairman. Mr. Windham agreed that the liability amount seems low, and would not cover an error, accident, etc. on a major project.

#### **8. Alarm Monitoring Services (Attachment G)**

Several years ago the City changed alarm monitoring services from All-Star Alarms to Premier Security. Premier Security was then bought out by Loud Security. The City's experience with Loud Security has not been satisfactory. Their response time on repairs and malfunctions is two-three weeks. The staff decided to explore options from other vendors that are local.

Staff obtained bids from three vendors, one of which was All-Star Alarms. Staff recommends awarding a contract to All-Star Alarms, who provided the lowest bid, for performance of these services.

No concerns were indicated by the Councilmembers. The issue will be included on the September regular session agenda.

James Windham also stated this vendor may be able to help with the difficulties being experienced trying to have hybrid meetings, i.e., some attending in person and some attending virtually.

#### **9. Signage on E. Richardson Street and Airport Road**

James Windham stated that the street sign seems a bit low at this intersection. He also stated that there are inconsistencies with GPS directions as to the name of the road. He recommended dual signage showing E. Richardson Street and Airport Road.

Jody Reid advised he would see if they can add another sign with a bracket. This situation is similar to E. Soule Street/Williams Road/City Pond Road.

#### **10. Other Business**

No other business was raised.

#### **11. Work Session Meeting Review**

- Millage Rate – adopt rollback rate at September regular session
- IGA for Tax Collection – approve at September regular session
- Employee Handbook – send comments to Marcia Brooks, copy Mayor Eady. If no issues are raised, adopt at September regular session
- Official City Holidays – adopt at September regular session
- Bureau Veritas Contract – investigate limited liability clause

- Alarm Monitoring Services – award contract to All Star Alarms at September regular session
- Signage on E. Richardson St. and Airport Road – Jody will see if he can add a sign to the existing post.

**12. Executive Session**

The City Council entered Executive Session at 7:42 p.m. to discuss personnel matters.

The City Council adjourned from Executive Session at 8:12 p.m.

**Laura McCanless made a motion to amend the offer to the City Manager candidate that was approved at the August 10, 2021 meeting to \$85,000 annually. Lynn Bohanan seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously (6/0).**

**13. Adjourn**

**Laura McCanless made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:13 p.m. Lynn Bohanan seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (6/0).**

Respectfully Submitted,



Marcia Brooks  
City Clerk/Treasurer